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978-1-107-07659-4 - Conjuring Asia: Magic, Orientalism, and the Making of the Modern World

Chris Goto-Jones

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## Conjuring Asia

The promise of magic has always commanded the human imagination, but the story of industrial modernity is usually seen as a process of disenchantment. Drawing on the writings and performances of the so-called Golden Age Magicians from the turn of the twentieth century, Chris Goto-Jones unveils the ways in which European and North American encounters with (and representations of) Asia – the fabled Mystic East – worked to re-enchant experiences of the modern world. Beginning with a reconceptualization of the meaning of ‘modern magic’ itself – moving beyond conventional categories of ‘real’ and ‘fake’ magic – Goto-Jones’ acclaimed book guides us on a magical mystery tour around India, China, and Japan, showing us levitations and decapitations, magic duels and bullet catches, goldfish bowls and paper butterflies. In the end, this mesmerizing book reveals Orientalism as a kind of magic in itself, casting a spell over Western culture that leaves it transformed, even today.

**Chris Goto-Jones** is Professor of Comparative Philosophy & Political Thought at Leiden University, where he was previously Professor of Modern Japan Studies. He is also a Professorial Research Fellow of SOAS, University of London.

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## Praise for Conjuring Asia

*'If magic is the art of accomplishing the impossible, Goto-Jones emerges as a scholar-magician: a wonderful book in every sense.'*

DERREN BROWN

*'Goto-Jones opens with a surprise: far from killing magic, modern science made it better. But his main trick is to follow magicians on a cross-cultural chase to India, China, and Japan; what began as a celebration of the Golden Age of Magic becomes a treatise on global modernity. This is performance research at its finest.'*

MARTIN PUCHNER, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

*'Modernity and magic are usually seen in opposition to one another, as in early modern Europe. In Chris Goto-Jones's extraordinary book, we see that they were in fact intricately intertwined as modern Asia came into being. By combining ideas about illusion and reality with the discourse of progress in China, Japan, and India, Goto-Jones gives us a wholly original, deeply thoughtful, and innovative approach to the history of colonial and semi-colonial Asia, as well as representations of Asia in the West.'*

RANA MITTER, OXFORD UNIVERSITY

*'Conjuring Asia is a wonderful book – yes, full of wonders – at once erudite and entertaining, dazzling. It is full of marvelous material gleaned from hard-to-come-by and all-too-overlooked popular sources. This stupendous research has been judiciously organized into Goto-Jones' eloquent, articulate, insightful, and engaging critical analysis of a historical and modern transnational culture of magic.'*

LEE SIEGEL, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

*'With Chris Goto-Jones's Conjuring Asia, the academic study of secular magic comes of age. Surprisingly enough, that is because*

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*the book itself is so formally inventive and such fun to read. For scholars, yes indeed. But for all magic fans too.'*

SIMON DURING, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

*'A flying carpet of brilliant colors; a work of great originality and charm, dexterity, and verve. Not only concerned with magic per se, its deep interest lies in the way that a focus on magic reveals the course of Western rationality and modernization.'*

JULIA ADENEY THOMAS, UNIVERSITY OF  
NOTRE DAME

*'If you have ever wondered about the performance magic of India, China or Japan this is the book to read. It is a thoroughly engaging study, with approachable scholarship and fascinating notes; it considers these "Oriental" magics not only historically but also philosophically, culturally and politically. A truly wonderful book.'*

EUGENE BURGER

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